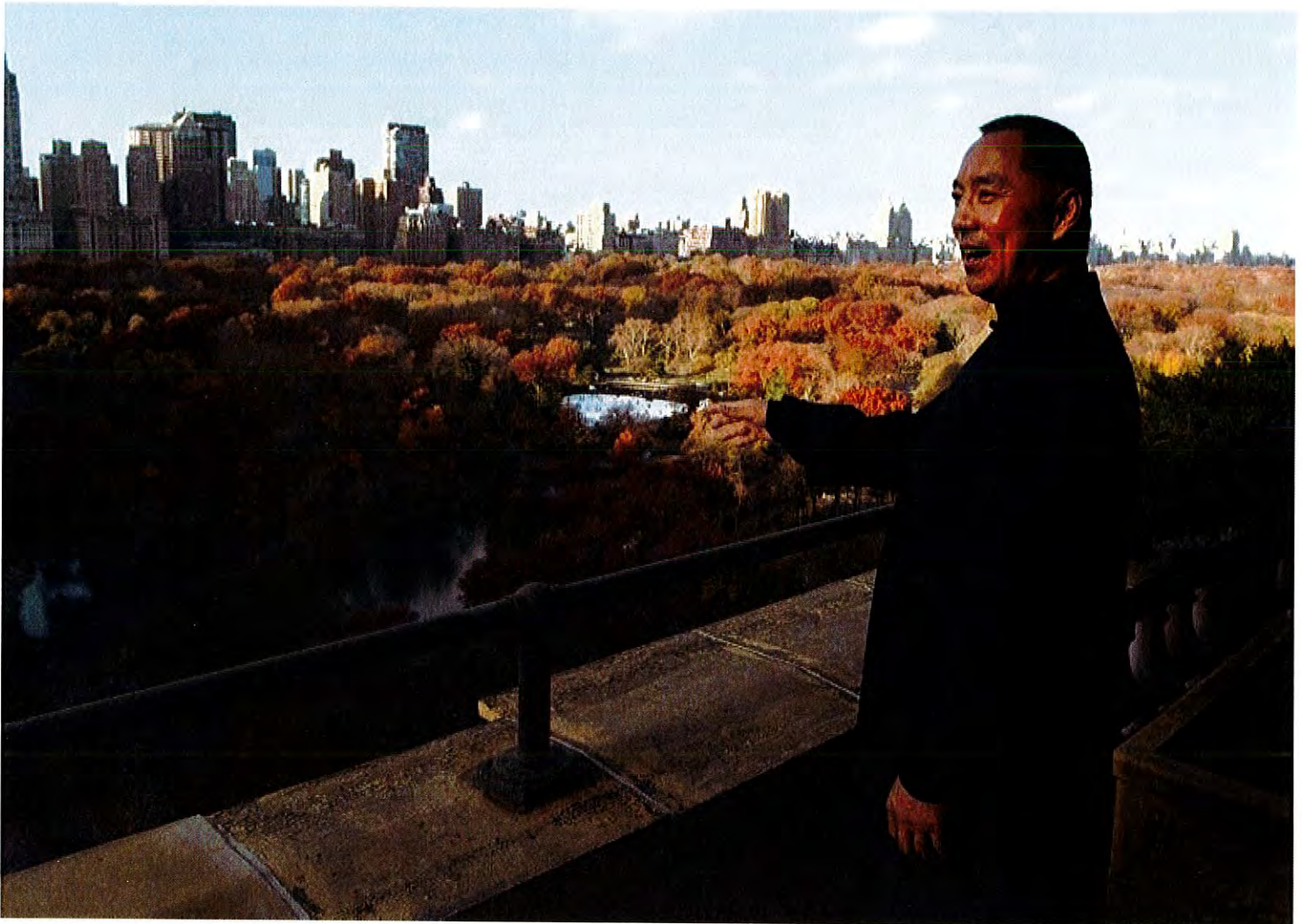


# Billionaire Guo Wengui wants regime change in Beijing



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AFP News9 December 2017



Billionaire Guo Wengui, who is seeking asylum in the United States after accusing officials in his native China of corruption, is photographed at his New York apartment on November 28, 2017  
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From a luxury Manhattan apartment, Chinese billionaire Guo Wengui is plotting a "change of the regime" in Beijing and developing a new media platform with the aim of introducing democracy in the world's most populous country.

The fugitive real estate mogul settled in April in New York, on the 18th floor of a hotel facing Central Park, where he's now waiting with his wife for a decision on his claim for US political asylum.

"I want to try and to have rule of law, I want to try and have democracy, freedom, that's my ultimate goal... A change of the regime," he told AFP in a recent exclusive interview. He's set a timeline of three years.

For several months, Guo has been flooding social networks with searing accusations of corruption against China's rich and powerful.

Few Chinese tycoons choose dissent. But Guo, whose property was seized and two brothers imprisoned since he fled from China in 2014, says his campaign has been brewing for 28 years.

Amid the crackdown on pro-democracy protesters on Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989, "my little brother died in front of me... I was detained for 22 months."

It was in prison that he decided to "wrestle with this system under the Communist party that is inhumane, not democratic, unlawful."

While some accuse the businessman, who is not shy about publicizing his ostentatious lifestyle, of hypocrisy in his allegations of corruption among China's political elite, Guo denies accusations that he himself is also guilty of graft.

"Why would I do this? I don't need the money, I have money," he said, ticking off possessions such as apartments in New York and London and a yacht, as well as "a wonderful family."

- Flee or be eliminated -

"But I am a Buddhist, I want to be kind to other people... I want to change the evil regime," said Guo, who gives his age as 47 despite uncertainty about his birthdate due to the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution in China at the time.

"All the successful businessmen in China, there are only two fates for them: one is to flee the country, the other is waiting to be eliminated."

He chose to go on the offensive, posting unsubstantiated yet politically sensitive allegations.

His Twitter account, which has nearly 480,000 followers, has been repeatedly blocked since China's Communist Party congress in October, he said.

Undeterred, Guo has been developing a new media platform that he intends to launch before the end of December to expose the flaws of China's Communist regime.



Guo has developed a relationship in the US that seems unexpected -- with Steve Bannon, US President Donald Trump's former strategist who has called for Washington to wage "economic war" with China.

"He is one of the best international political experts I have ever seen. Mr Bannon is one of the very few Westerners who really understands Asia," said Guo.

Guo said he has met ten times with Bannon, the one-time Goldman Sachs investment banker and head of influential ultraconservative outlet Breitbart News and that they have discussed his new platform, which he did not describe in detail.

"I have money, you know this, lots of money prepared for this," Guo said of the project.

- Trump and Xi -

Guo, dressed all in black and smiling, spoke in English with AFP on the topic of democracy. Otherwise he spoke in Chinese through an interpreter.

With his little white dog Snow in his arms, Guo took reporters on a tour of his home, including a magnificent terrace with sprawling views of Central Park, and his office, where he has on display a photo of himself with the Dalai Lama.

Guo confirmed Wall Street Journal reports that he had been visited by Chinese government agents in his apartment in May.

He said the agents had one objective: "They are here to silence me... They want me to stop talking about the corrupt officials in the Chinese government."

"There are more than 100 hours of conversation I have on tape," he said. "For them, it was too big a threat!"

Guo said he thinks "very highly" of Trump, and is a member of the US leader's tony Mar-a-Lago club in Florida. But he nevertheless is critical of Trump's policies toward China.

"He is too focused on his own advantages, his own strengths," Guo said. "Politics is different from business."

As for Chinese President Xi Jinping, Guo called him "the most human, most emotional person out of all the (Chinese) officials."

He partly hopes that Xi would steer China to a Singapore-style governance model with "a kind of rule-of-law society under one party rule that is friendly to the Western world."

In the meantime, Guo keeps in touch with his elderly parents in Beijing and checks on his properties around the world via dozens of cameras that he monitors from his tablet.

Even if he is successful in dismantling the Chinese political structure, Guo, who boasts of constructing "among the most beautiful modern buildings" in China, pledges that he has no ambition of becoming a "Chinese Trump" one day.

"I like freedom, I like to travel, I like to enjoy life," he said. "I'd rather die than be a politician."